

## IS EUTHYPHRO A MAN BECAUSE HE IDENTIFIES AS A MAN?

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**Euthyphro's gender trouble:** The relative *explanatory* priority of our genders vs. gender identities.

*The identity-first approach* ( $\approx$  everybody): Euthyphro is a man because he identifies as a man.

*The gender-first approach* (Ding): Euthyphro identifies as a man because he is a man.

**Aim of this talk:** I make the first argument for the gender-first approach on trans feminist grounds, for it to be taken seriously as a particularly viable, appealing path to a trans feminist metaphysics of gender, by appeal to its explanatory power.

HOLD ON, DING, WHAT ARE YOU EVEN ON ABOUT?

**My motivating worry:** The identity-first approach is “trans-inclusive” only at a cost; it is ill-suited to explain salient features of gender reality as trans people live and know it on trans people’s own terms.<sup>1</sup>

*Trans-inclusive feminism:* Starts with how cis people do gender and then tags on *gender identity* to retrofit trans people into the substantively unaltered framework of an otherwise cis-centric theory.

*(Radical) trans feminism:* Seeks a metaphysics of gender (not just gender identity!) that begins with trans people’s lived material realities on trans people’s own terms.

⚠ Caveats incoming ⚠

Gender- vs. identity-first  $\neq$  social position vs. personal identity (Barnes, Jenkins, etc., are identity-first).

Explanatory priority  $\neq$  temporal priority (not “born this way”)  $\neq$  causal priority (feedback loop).

Both my view and my argument for it are modeled on inference to the best explanation.

### THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPLANATORY POWER

Given the myriad of ways I experience the social meaning of my embodied sex, which gender(s), or the negation thereof, may best explain who I am and how I’m situated in this world?

- a) *Trial and error:* We try on different gender identities in search of something that fits and reflects our lived relationship with gender, often accompanied by *genuine confusion* along the way and *retroactive recognition* of our earlier genders on reflection.
- b) *Lived social positions and relations:* Incarcerated trans women, for instance, face sexual and physical violence at an unfathomable rate precisely because they *are* the women in a race-, class-, gang-structured prison heterosexual economy.

In turn, incarcerated trans women find it absolutely necessary to invoke not only their trans femininity but their womanhood and explain the sexual and physical violence directed at them as violence against *women*, not gender-nonconforming gay men.

1. I run this argument in different ways in my “Pregnant Persons as a Gender Category: A Trans Feminist Analysis of Pregnancy Discrimination,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 50, no. 3 (Spring 2025): 733–57, and “The Cisgender Tipping Point,” *APA Studies on LGBTQ Philosophy*, special issue on “Make Philosophy Queer Again,” forthcoming.

- c) *Clarifying force of fitting identities*: There must be some reason why interpreting ourselves as our lived rather than imposed genders feels so right, so fitting, so clarifying; the latest accounts of gender subjectivity from trans metaphysics *describe* this phenomenon but fail to *explain* it.

**My claim:** The gender-first approach offers a *really* natural, straightforward explanation for what's up, whereas the identity-first approach struggles.

What best explains our embodied gender experiences often turns out to be fine-grained (e.g., *being a woman having been forced to play drag as a "normal" straight cis boy and at times succeeded in so doing*).

It may also be distanced from the three usual suspects (e.g., *dolls, butches, trans fem tomboys, theory dykes with an em dash problem*).

We may craft identities that diverge from our explanatory genders (e.g., *butch-trans masc borders*).

#### THE BUILDING BRICK THEORY OF GENDER

The gender-first approach's main challenge can be met by the specific gender-first account I favor.

*What is gender as an empirical phenomenon?* Gender is the *meanings* that we make out of the relevant concrete material, personal, relational, social, political, and historical situations socially given to us, on an analogy to building with Legos.

*What are our individual genders?* Our genders just are *whatever* may turn out to best explain gender reality as we live and interpret it, which we in turn figure out by inference to the best explanation.

This gives us an objective story of what our genders are that our subjective judgments can genuinely get wrong and which others may figure out before we do. And it has no trans-inclusion problem.

Often the cases are underdescribed, and often our gender identities are overriding data points.

But there are also cases where our gender identities are not and should not be dispositive of our explanatory genders (e.g., the spectrum of trans girlhood).

There are girls who've always known, girls who "don't know what's going on but nothing fucking works,"<sup>2</sup> girls who savor the delights of "genderben[ding] like it was nobody's business," girls who cope by hitting the gym "in a misguided attempt to achieve an attractiveness in the eyes of my partners that I thought unattainable to anyone but women," girls who make do with being nerds because that's "what you get when think you're a boy, don't want to be hyper masculine, and have that dysphoric shyness that accompanies so many of us,"<sup>3</sup> and lots and lots more.

Our early relationships with gender can also make it such that identifying as a boy under those circumstances really did and still does feel right all things considered, but that this is itself best explained by us having been *not boys but girls who identified as boys*.

Earlier episodes of gender experiences often go on to shape and in turn be resignified by subsequent ones, looping back into the best explanation of just what those episodes are.

Compulsory cissexuality operating how it does, our own subjective senses of what best explains the totality of our embodied gendered experiences can really be far further off than the knowing, loving eye of our trans siblings (if not Bluesky timelines).

2. Alana Storm, Review of *When Monsters Speak: A Susan Stryker Reader*, by Susan Stryker, edited by McKenzie Wark, August 31, 2024 <https://gliff.org/posts/review-of-when-monsters-speak-a-susan-stryker-reader.html>.

3. Auto Anon, "Trans Femme Masculinity," archived May 5, 2020, [https://transreads.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-05-05\\_5eb194ee8424c\\_TransFemmeMasculinity.pdf](https://transreads.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-05-05_5eb194ee8424c_TransFemmeMasculinity.pdf).